WHAT THE WORLD OWES LUTHER

JUNIUS B. REMENSNYDER

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OCT 1917

By
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"Great men are the fire-pillars in this dark pilgrimage of mankind; they stand as heavenly signs, everlasting witnesses of what has been, prophetic tokens of what may still be, the revealed embodied possibilities of human nature."

—THOMAS CARLYLE.

I

LUTHER'S EARLY YEARS

ON the night of the tenth of November, 1483, more than four centuries ago, in the quaint little German town of Eisleben, Luther, the monk who shook the world, was born.

A century before, the martyr Hus prophesied that from his ashes in a hundred years another swan—the meaning of Hus in the Bohemian tongue—would arise who could not be destroyed. As Luther's family coat of arms was a swan, many historians have seen in his birth a fulfillment of the dying martyr's prophecy.

Whether such strange coincidences are mere accidents, or whether they are links in that chain of mystic agency which circumvents the realities of life, one can never know. But certainly the gaze of the supernatural world could not have been closed to what then and there transpired. Says Thomas Carlyle: "In the world that day, there was not a more entirely unimportant looking pair of people than this miner and his wife. And yet what were all emperors, popes and potentates in comparison? There was born here once more a mighty man, whose light was to flame as the beacon over long centuries and epochs of the world.

History was waiting for this man. It is strange. It is great. It leads us back to another birth hour, in a still meaner environment, 1,900 years ago, of which it is fit that we say nothing; that we think only in silence—for what words are there! The age of miracles past! The age of miracles is forever here."

The talents early evinced by Luther made his father—a man of strong character,—and his mother, —a woman beloved for her rare feminine graces—resolve to give him a thorough education. So, in his fifteenth year they sent him to the flourishing school at Eisenach. Here, he was so pressed by poverty that he had to beg his bread. A wealthy lady, Ursula Cotta, who had often been struck by the rare sweetness of Luther's voice in the church choir, one Christmas Eve when he was singing a carol at her door for bread, called him in and made him an inmate of her family. Here he enjoyed all the refining influences of a cultured home. Luther never forgot this kindness. Years after, at the height of his fame, similarly receiving her son into his household, and making the significant remark when he recurred to the incident: "There is nothing sweeter than the heart of a pious woman."

LUTHER AT THE UNIVERSITY

Thence, Luther went to the University of Erfurth, the most renowned in Germany. Here, while one day in the library, he found a copy of the Bible—a book he had never seen, only hearing

the Scripture lessons read by the priests. A striking commentary on the state of Christendom at that time, when a highly educated student had not seen that holy volume which now even the simple and wayfaring have in their hands! Luther eagerly opens the Bible, and, as he reads, a new light dawns in his eyes, and a new thrill wakes his inner life!

Says the historian D'Aubigne of Luther as a student: "His powerful intellect, the glow of his imagination, and his remarkable memory, soon gave him the start of all his fellow students. He was especially gifted in the dead languages, in rhetoric and in poetry: cheerful, obliging, sociable and good-hearted, he was beloved by his teachers and companions." Wrote Melancthon: "The whole university admired his genius."

But just when, with great pomp and a splendid procession, he had been created master of arts and doctor of philosophy and the most brilliant future invited him, he one night summoned his friends to a repast. Music, pleasure and gayety ruled the hour, but at their very height, Luther stepped into the midst of the company and announced his resolve to become a monk. And, having bidden this public farewell to the world, that very night he hastened to a cloister, and as its doors closed upon him, the world with its prizes was renounced forever. Luther's companions were stupefied. His father, whose hopes were dashed to the ground, disowned him, but all protest failed to move him.

The secret of this extraordinary step was that the finding of the Bible had brought Luther face to face with that question, which to all imperial natures must ever be the most stupendous in time —the everlasting welfare of his soul. Nothing is a surer indication of a weak and frivolous mind than for one never in fear and trembling to say to his deepest self: "What must I do to be saved?"

We now see Luther as a monk, seeking the way of life in a monastery. He was most assiduous in fastings, penances and ascetical practices. He writes: "So strictly did I observe the duties of the order, that if ever any monk has entered heaven by way of a monastery, then would I have. I tormented myself to death to procure for my troubled heart and agitated conscience peace before God, but encompassed with thick darkness, I nowhere found peace." Such was the sharpness of his soul-struggles that sometimes he remained solitary in his cell for days without food. Several times he fell fainting on the floor, and his fellow monks feared he would die. But at last, when he found all these methods worse than useless, he was led to the discovery that man is justified, not by penances and self-lacerations, but by faith in the mercy of God and forgiveness of sins through the atoning blood of Christ. When this sunburst broke upon his soul, he tells us in the poetical exuberance of his newly-found faith that all those passages of Scripture that once alarmed him, seemed now to "run to him from all sides, to smile, to spring up, to dance and play

around him." Luther thus had regained the lost cardinal truth—the very heart of the Gospel—justification by faith alone. He now holds in his hand the key of the lost paradise. And all unconsciously he goes forth from his closet to give this soul-freedom to the world.

It was this strength and joyousness given from getting at the inner meaning of Scripture, which gave such heartiness and assurance to Luther in the many trying periods of his life. The Scriptures revealed to him God as Lord, and God as a Father, comforting, guiding and walking with His children. And it was this joyous confidence of the Christian life that so commended it to those who only knew the austerity and fearsomeness of the Romanistic conception of Christianity. Hence those who once experienced the power and blessedness of the Gospel as revealed by Luther, felt that he had restored to them a lost treasure greater than all worldly riches.

II

LUTHER, THE MAN

AN eye-witness and hearer gives us a pen portrait of his personal appearance. He was of medium stature, handsomely proportioned. His features were regular, softened with refined feeling. He had remarkable eyes, large and deep, dark and brilliant, with an amber circle around the pupil, which made them seem to emit fire when under excitement. His hair was dark and waving. His mouth was elegantly formed, expressive of determination, tenderness and humour. Though strongly built, he was generally spare and wasted from hard labours, incessant studies and an abstemious life. His countenance was brave and open, and his attitude in speaking manly and bold. He stood remarkably firm on his feet; his form bent rather backward than forward; his face thrown up and flashing like a lion.

Mosellan, professor at Leipsic University, gives this pen portrait of Luther, at the age of thirty-five, in his famous discussion with the Roman Catholic Dr. Eck at Leipsic: "Martin is of medium height and slender form, with a body so wasted both with cares and study that you can almost count his bones. He is just in the prime of life with a clear and pene-

trating voice. His learning is wonderful, and he has everything at command. He has a great forest of ideas and of words. In his manner he is polite and affable, not in the least stoical or supercilious, and he is able to adapt himself to all occasions. In company, he is a gay and merry jester, alert and good humoured, everywhere with a bright and cheerful face, however terribly his enemies threaten him."

"He kept three printing-presses going and yet they could not keep up with his pen. His lightning speed was the despair of friends and foes alike. Wonderful that so hastily done, his writings should so richly repay reading after the lapse of four centuries. The physical and mental vitality of the man was one of the most amazing things about him, and one of the secrets of his tremendous power." [1]

LUTHER THE PREACHER

Luther was a great preacher. A man of the people, his heart aglow with human sympathy, the pulpit was his natural sphere. Such a fire did his eloquence kindle in the wooden Wittenberg Chapel, where he first began to preach, that a contemporary says that it was not unaptly to be compared to the stable in which Christ was born. His power over an audience was magnetic. Whenever he was to preach, crowds flocked to hear him, and sometimes he held 25,000 auditors stilled and awed by the spell

[1] Professor McGiffert's "Life of Luther."

of his oratory. Says Fish in his "Masterpieces of Eloquence": "It cannot be denied that, for about thirty years, Luther was the greatest pulpit orator living." Bossuet, the great Roman Catholic writer, a bitter foe of Protestantism, testified: "Luther had a strength of genius, a vehemence in his discourses, a living and impetuous eloquence, which entranced and ravished the people." And Calvin, the great reformer, pays him this eulogy: "Luther is the trumpet, or rather he is the thunder, he is the lightning which has roused the world from its lethargy. It is not so much Luther who speaks as God, whose lightnings burst from his lips." His voice was sonorous and far-reaching; his action vehement and passionate, and when, reaching his climax, he bore down with the full torrent of his oratory, the effect upon the audience was irresistible. The love of God, sin, faith in the Crucified, and the need of a holy inner life, were the themes rushing in burning accents from his lips and setting the souls of his hearers aflame. His strict Bible themes, and reverent and devout manner, scathingly rebuke the modern sensational preacher, and the irreverent evangelist, while the indescribable results produced show that the Gospel need not be secularized and scandalized to gain for it a popular hearing.

LUTHER A LEADER OF MEN

Luther had by nature a remarkable gift for leadership. He was endowed with a strong *will-*

power. When convinced that he had grasped a truth, and that his stand was right, nothing human or superhuman could make him swerve. And he had that unique quality, that he could head a movement, utterly regardless of whether a single one would follow him. His balance of judgment, too, was so wise and far-visioned that electors, princes and kings came to him for counsel, and deferred to his decision. He was not alone the religious leader, but the master of diplomacy of his time. This gave him such a supreme authority for thirty years as no person has ever attained in any age. "He bestrode Europe like a Colossus," writes a historian.

Scholars, critics, philosophers, moralists, and poetic geniuses may exert wide influence, but are quite inadequate to the creation of a new order of things. This can be achieved alone by a calm and resolute will, which has the courage, confidence and endurance to take up the fight against an existing world-order, and continue the struggle until it is overthrown. The possession of this heroic will, this "most rare and most mighty of the creative forces of history" was the marked endowment of Luther. And it was just this masterful will that gave men confidence and induced them to follow him. In this forcefulness lay the secret of his success. He was born for leadership. And though earth, sea, and air were peopled with opposing devils, his clarion call bore the hosts of righteousness on to victory.

LUTHER, STUDENT AND SCHOLAR

Luther, moreover, was a brilliant student, *scholar* and writer. For these extraordinary talents he was appointed at the age of twenty-five professor in the newly founded university at Wittenberg. At twenty-seven, seven monasteries elected him to bear an embassy to the Pope at Rome. At twenty-eight he was made doctor of theology. And so famous soon became his lectures, that students, and even professors, flocked from all parts of Germany to hear him, and Wittenberg became the foremost university in that land of scholars and universities.

Full well, too, he knew the "terrible toil" requisite for thorough scholarship. He thus became skilled in the learned languages, he was a patient student of history, he delighted in the schools of the philosophers, he was a profound theologian, he was versed in the sciences, and his retentive memory made these vast stores ready for use. So his pen was indeed mightier than the sword. He was a clear and trenchant writer; his illustrations were lively, his humour keen, and he knew well how to drive to the mark. So pungent and telling were his thoughts that Melancthon called them "thunderbolts." "His words are half battles," said Jean Paul Richter. Scholars and the plain people were equally moved by them. Erasmus, the first scholar of that day, wrote: "I learn more from one page of Luther than from all the works of Thomas Aquinas." And plain John Bunyan attests of his Commentary on Galatians: "Of all the books I

ever met, I found it the most fit for a wounded conscience."

The versatility of Luther's pen seems almost incredible. Translations, commentaries, doctrinal treatises, confessions of faith, popular tracts and circular letters followed each other with unparallelled rapidity. With all these, he found time to publish a liturgy for public worship, orders for baptism and the Lord's supper, and a Catechism for youth, which at once became an incomparable classic, circulated in more languages than any uninspired volume. He also published a German hymn-book, of which the poet Coleridge says: "Luther did as much for the Reformation by his hymns as by the translation of the Bible; the children learned them in the cottage, and martyrs sang them on the scaffold." The most notable of these is that battle song of the Reformation, "Ein Feste Burg ist Unser Gott," of which Dr. Schaff says: "It is the great Marseillaise of Protestantism —its words and notes thrill on the heart like bugle blasts from heaven." Luther's publications, from massive volumes to pamphlets, number upwards of two thousand,—an average of over one a week for his working life—an amazing proof of the power resident in a single soul. The style in these incessant writings vividly reflected the many-sidedness of Luther's mind. There is no art or resource in the whole range of letters which his pen does not bring under tribute to overwhelm his papal opponents. His style is now like "the gleaming of

swords, now galling with irony like the bite of an adder, now winning like the rustle and glance of jewelled garments, now terrible as the lightning, now tender as the dew, now sparkling with his native humour, now close, rapid in argument as the tread of armed men, now wildly and grandly reverent as the voice of forests, or the solemn roar of the sea." Disseminated by the just invented printing-press, Luther's writings flew world-wide and their influence smote all hearts. They have been translated in every modern tongue, and to-day, by them, the Reformer's thoughts are still reaching millions of readers.

III

LUTHER BEGINS THE REFORMATION

WE now find this modest, brave monk on the eve of beginning the Reformation—the most epochal work since the birth of Christianity. Luther's talents and piety moved the elector Frederick to appoint him professor in the newly-founded University of Wittenberg. The Pope, in urgent need of money to complete the great cathedral of St. Peter at Rome, commissioned one Tetzel to sell indulgences for sin. He came to Juterback, four miles from Wittenberg, and proclaimed with brazen effrontery: "There is no sin so great that the indulgence cannot remit it. The instant the money clinks in the chest, the soul escapes from purgatory to heaven." Luther's heart bled for the poor, misguided people, and having drawn up ninety-five theses on true evangelical repentance and faith, and not papal indulgences, as the sole means of forgiveness of sins, all alone, he nailed them up on the castle church door on the eve of All Saints' Day, the thirty-first of October, 1517. Luther drives the last nail and retires to his cell, little dreaming that the blows of that hammer were to arouse the slumbering middle ages, to cross oceans and continents, and to resound through all coming time!

When the gathered crowds read the theses next

day, a great tumult spread throughout the city. But it was only the prelude to a far mightier commotion. "Within a month," says a historian of that day, "they had spread through all Christendom as if the angels of God had been their messengers."

From this act and time, history justly dates the beginning of the Reformation. The universal furore these theses caused showed that men had long dimly felt these truths, and that at last they had found a thinker and leader bold enough to express and champion them. Luther kept the movement advancing by public disputations, controversial tracts and stirring addresses to the nobility and people, until all Europe was in a ferment, and the alarmed Pope issued a bull excommunicating him. Whereupon Luther took a step that showed the papal hierarchy the mettle of the man with whom they had now come to deal, and at whose boldness the world trembled. He publicly burned the bull and papal decretals. This was on December 10, 1520. As the flames kindled, a great shout burst from the bystanders. It was "the shout of the awakening of nations." The Pope now saw that this daring rebel must be crushed, or that his ancient sceptre would fall.

THE DIET AT WORMS

Accordingly in April, 1521, the Diet of Worms was called to consider the religious ferment. It was an Ecumenical council, which, according to the traditional theory, expressed the infallible decree

of the Church. This was to be an epoch-making council. From it history has dated the beginning of the Reformation. The cleavage there made in the ancient unity and authority of the historic Church of Christ has grown and widened ever since. From that era Christianity has been divided into two great streams, Roman and Protestant. This leads us to consider the two chief actors in the scene.

LUTHER AND CHARLES, THE GREAT
(A Dramatic Episode)

The two leaders most conspicuous on the stage in the Reformation, and who most held in their hands future human destinies, were, on the religious side, Luther, and on the political, Charles V. Both were personalities of commanding character and interest. Both were deeply conscientious, and assured of the rightfulness of their cause, and both were locked in a lifelong struggle.

Charles, when only in his twentieth year, had succeeded to the throne of the greatest empire in the world. His titular dignity was that of Emperor of Rome, Germany and Spain. He thus held under his sway the most powerful and fairest countries of Europe.

His coronation had taken place in 1520 at Aix-la-Chapelle, where, amid ceremonies of gorgeous splendour, the golden diadem of Charlemagne had been placed upon his head, and girt with his sword, he was proclaimed Roman emperor.

Charles was by nature of very different fibre

from most princes. He had a noble air and refined manners. He was earnest, serious, given to thought and study. He was cautious of his words, firm of purpose, slow to decide, gifted with a cool judgment, always master of himself, and had that rare quality of greatness, a disposition to be tolerant to his opponents.

The papal legate wrote from Worms to Pope Leo of him: "They may say what they please, but it seems to me that this young prince is gifted with good sense and judgment far beyond his years, and he has, I believe, much more in his head than appears on his face."

Charles was naturally very religious: a devoted believer in the Romanish Church, and a hearty defender of the traditional faith of Christendom. This fact—one not often taken into account—that the imperial head of Europe and the champion of the Roman Catholic party was so pious, temperate and wise,—immensely strengthened the cause of mediævalism, and made the task which devolved upon Luther incalculably more difficult.

Scarcely had this emperor come to the throne when he was confronted by a problem of the gravest character. An obscure monk, one Martin Luther, had dared to call the Church to answer for her errors as to the true Christian faith, and for encouraging the prevalence of corruptions dangerous to the souls of men, and causing oppressive social conditions. It was sought to quiet him, but the most imposing exhibitions of authority

had failed. Threats, anathemas, bulls of excommunication—all had been in vain. The Church began to realize that the monk of Wittenberg was no ordinary personality, and that to suppress his movement and himself, measures of utmost decision must be resorted to. And so an Ecumenical council was called to summon him to trial.

While the emperor no doubt was disposed to look with contempt upon Luther as an arch-heretic and a visionary radical, still he had admonitions as to his unusual force. He knew the wisdom and conservatism of Frederick, the great elector of Saxony, to whom the imperial crown had been offered, but who had refused it. And the fact that this strong prince championed Luther, in so far as to demand a safe conduct for him, could not pass unnoticed by Charles. Moreover, among other letters, his own ambassador, Juan Mannel, writing from Rome, had warned him: "Let his majesty pay more attention to a little monk, Martin Luther."

Pope Leo X had sought to prevent the assembling of the council. He wished to have Luther peremptorily condemned. But Charles had heard enough of Luther to convince him that the movement was too serious for his sense of justice to allow it to be disposed of in this summary manner. He thought Luther should not be condemned without an opportunity to be heard in his own behalf. So the Ecumenical council was called at Worms, in April, 1521.

Here these two great personalities met for the first time. It is hard to tell which was looked on with keener interest. Charles, the young emperor, clothed in imperial vestments, and surrounded by a most brilliant array of princes, cardinals and dignitaries of Church and State, was naturally the central and most imposing figure.

On the opposite side appears a humble, helpless monk, on trial for his life. Yet the interest in this lowly personage was perhaps not less than that in the mighty emperor. For four years Luther's writings and daring deeds had stirred all Europe. Theologians had read and discussed his books. *Litterateurs* and statesmen had seen in them principles which breathed the air of civil and religious liberty, while peasants had received comfort and strength from them at their humble firesides. Luther's entrance into Worms had been hailed by the populace with a wild enthusiasm that must have sounded a note of warning to the lords both temporal and spiritual.

And so all eyes are centered upon the one who has caused this vast commotion, as he enters the hall and is led to the stand. Then, for the first time, Charles the Great and Luther look each other in the face.

A pile of volumes is on the stand, and Luther is required to abjure the rebellious errors and arraignments of Holy Mother Church contained in them.

Luther admits their authorship, and then, instead of giving a direct answer, asks time for delay. A

day is given him. His friends, who have never seen his courage waver, feel disappointed at his action. Luther was a person who realized most deeply his religious responsibility. And probably for the moment, the awe which he was trained to feel towards Councils, Pope and Church, as representing the authority of Christ, the great Head, overcame him, and he shrank from wearing the stigma of heresy. The night, no doubt, was spent in closest meditation and prayer.

The next day, one of the most momentous in the history of the world, Luther appeared, calm, confident and resolute. His course was now firmly fixed. In an address of two hours' length, in which he thrilled the august assembly by his resourceful learning, his marvellous eloquence and intrepid courage, he proceeded to arraign the dominant Church as having falsely interpreted the Scriptures and for introducing soul-misleading abuses. He was twice interrupted by the young emperor, who resented his challenging the authority of the Pope, and especially of a general ecclesiastical council, as sacrilege. Luther replied with courtesy and dignity, beseeching Charles not to stain the splendid beginning of his reign by a forcible attempt to suppress a movement inspired by the true interpretation of the Word of God.

He ended with those remarkable words which, at a distance of four centuries, still make our hearts bound within us:

"Unless I am convinced by proofs drawn from

the Holy Scriptures, or from sound reason, I neither can nor will submit my faith to the Pope or Councils as infallible, for it is as clear as daylight that they have fallen into error, and it is neither safe nor advisable for a Christian to sin against his conscience. *Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me. Amen.*"

When Luther closed, the force of his great personality had impressed itself upon all. He left the hall, not as he had entered it, but with the gesture of one who knew that his words had struck home, and with the air of a pikeman who had dealt his blow. He had launched forth his mighty challenge to Church and empire. As he went out he threw up his hands joyously and cried, "I am through, I am through!" His friends crowded about to congratulate him. And the great elector, Frederick the Wise, privately expressed his pleasure that he had taken so extraordinary a man under his protection.

This dramatic episode was the only time Charles and Luther ever met, though for the next quarter of a century they were engaged in an unceasing battle. One striving to advance, the other to suppress the Reformation, they never saw each other again.

Mighty as were the temporal and ecclesiastical forces behind the emperor, Luther, his unique personality wielding the Word of God alone, was the real conqueror, and had initiated the oncoming of a new age.

The day after Luther's defense, Charles, who was

a conscientious adherent of the ancient *régime*, declared his resolve to loyally champion the ecclesiastical system in these words: "A single monk, trusting to his private judgment, has opposed the faith held by all Christians for a thousand years and more. I am resolved to defend this holy cause with all my dominions, my friends, my body and blood, my life and my soul." Brave, pious, noble, manly words! And yet so mistaken ones. What a lesson of tolerance, mutual forbearance, and the woeful mistake of judging one another, are we taught by such irreconcilable differences between conscientious leaders!

A commission of eight theologians was chosen to persuade Luther to make some compromise, but all to no purpose. The great reformer was too wise and far-visioned. He declared that he would make no concession whatever against the dictates of his conscience, and that he was ready to lay down his life rather than to yield one jot or tittle in his high ideals of Christian liberty. Persuasion and argument having failed, Luther was dismissed, and the Diet, on its last day, without a dissenting voice, passed an edict placing Luther under the ban of the empire, and forbidding him to preach, and all persons to give him food or water, or any support, on pain of death.

Thus, for the moment Charles had scored a seeming victory, but nothing could stay the overwhelming flood of the Reformation, against which his life was to be an unceasing struggle.

Although Charles had declared, after hearing Luther's reply, that he deemed him heretical, and never wished to hear him again, yet there is evidence that he moderated his opinions. At the next imperial Diet held at Augsburg in 1530, where the Protestants presented their famous Confession, he treated them with wise consideration. So benignant was his bearing, as contrasted with the fury of the Romish theologians, that Melancthon (it not being deemed judicious for Luther to attend in person) wrote: "More glorious than all his successes was the emperor's control of his temper. Never a word or action was the least overbearing. There was nothing grasping, not a sign of pride or intolerance. In spite of every effort to anger him, he listened to the Lutherans with a calm, judicial temper. His private life is a perfect model of continence and temperance."

At this point it is interesting to note, as Christopher Hare does in his recently published life of "Charles, a Great Emperor," the moderation and almost friendly feeling of Luther towards Charles. Alarmed by the uprising of the peasants, and fearing that the ideas of liberty he had promulgated were leading to revolutionary extremes on every hand, Luther preached the duty of loyal submission to Charles in matters political, and the emperor experienced the great value of this attitude for years to come. This magnanimity was ever characteristic of the large-mindedness of Luther. That Charles reciprocated this friendly feeling is shown

by his action at the Diet of Ratisbon in 1538, where he caused his toleration proposal to be submitted by friends to Luther.

In 1547, the year after Luther's death, when Charles entered Wittenberg a victor, he visited the tomb of Luther in the stately cathedral. And when the Bishop of Arras suggested that he exhume Luther's body and scatter his bones to the winds, he replied: "I war with the living, not with the dead. Let him rest in peace."

It is pleasing to think that these famous antagonists, who met personally but once in the historic drama of Worms, and who for a generation contested the fate of the world, entertained for each other more or less mutual regard.

But it certainly never occurred to Charles, as on that fateful day he, the mighty sovereign, confronted the obscure monk, that four hundred years later his own name would fade, so that it would alone be preserved in the dust-covered archives of history, while that of the humble one on trial before him would be known over the world, even to the poorest, and would have an imperishable and ever-growing fame. Still less could Luther have dreamed of such an outcome.

IV

LUTHER'S UNIQUE PERSONALITY

THE opening sentence of Dr. McGiffert's "Life of Luther" is, "Great men need not that we praise them: we need rather that we know them." They shine as stars of the first magnitude over the heights of greatness, that inspired by them we, too, may rise to higher things. The aim of the writer is to appraise the character of a hero, who more than any one of these latter generations has left his mark upon the world's destinies.

Writes a great thinker, "It is not so much by ideas as by personalities that God sets the world forward." In the case of such an epoch-maker as Luther, mankind naturally turns with the keenest interest to study his *personality.* In Luther's case, this is especially fascinating. No element of power, or variety, or charm, or romance seems lacking to it. It is perhaps the richest and most attractive personality in history. Wrote Phillips Brooks: "Luther is one of the greatest men of human history. It is the personality of Luther, afire with great indignations, originating great ideas, writing great books, doing great, brave, inspiring deeds, but carrying all the time its power in himself,—in being

what he was,—it is the personality of Luther which really holds the secret of his power." Says Dr. Dorner: "The personality of Luther is one of those great historical figures in which whole nations recognize their type." Coleridge calls him "the greatest personality since the days of the apostles." And Eucken, in his recent Nobel prize volume, "The Problem of Life," pays him this tribute: "The renovation of religion could only triumph if a sovereign personality appeared powerful enough to penetrate the root of the issues, and courageous enough to attack an existing order made inviolable by the faith of mankind. Such a personality appeared in Luther; all the spiritual currents that swept through the Reformation became flesh and blood in him; his masterful and concrete grasp of things filled the whole movement with glowing life and irresistible attraction." Let us analyze this colossal character.

LUTHER'S PIETY

The preëminent feature of Luther's personality was his living, energetic *faith*. He believed, therefore he spoke. Faith to him was no shadow, but a reality. Consequently, Luther laid hold upon the truth with a positive grasp. His conviction amounted to demonstration. He was no doubter or waverer. He did not rest with half-truths. The Scriptures were to him the very pillar and ground of certainty. Writing their words with chalk upon the wall of his room, or upon the desk

before him, they were for him that one only reality, armed with which he shrank not from challenging to combat the world, Satan and the gates of hell. His *prayers*, too, the most remarkable of which on the eve of the Diet of Worms was overheard and preserved, were veritable conversations and pleadings with God. While most reverent, some of these prayers, in desperate crises, were very bold in their wrestlings with the Almighty. Such was his half threat,—when his coadjutor, Melancthon, lay dying,—that if the Lord would not restore Melancthon, he would abandon His cause. And so sure then was he, that he took Melancthon's hand, and said, "You will not die," and he presently revived. In this case, as was his custom, when tremendously in earnest, he stood with his face to the open window. He prayed daily, and so far was he from using the modern excuse for want of time for religious devotions, that on one occasion he writes to a friend: "I am so overburdened with excessive work and toils that I have had to increase my time for prayer an hour each day in order that I may get through."

"Luther's force lay in this awful earnestness which made thoughts things to him, so that it was not he that spoke, but the truth itself which thundered from his lips, the fact which stood visibly before your eyes." This living faith it was that enabled him to speak with authority, and to place his single individuality against the swords of emperors, the fiats of popes and the councils of the

universal Church. The world is not moved by negations, by skeptics, by half-doubters. These may flare like a rocket, but as soon expire. Permanent influence is but wrought by men of definite beliefs, of positive faiths, of strong convictions. The spirit which met without flinching the lions in the Roman amphitheatre, or suffered in the dungeons of the Middle Ages, or that crossed the seas to conquer and transform this American wilderness into a cultured civilization, had no infidelity in it, was not tinctured with modern agnosticism, did not have doubts of God, or ignoble conceptions of man's origin and destiny. But, simple in heart and often unschooled in letters, these men were strong and overcame because of the robust manliness of their faith. Here, then, lay the wand of Luther's might, in that he dwelt in "the secret place of the Most High and" abode "under the shadow of the Almighty." He experienced religion,—that noblest impress of the Creator's image—in the furthest height, depth and reach of its uplift, wonder, beauty, joy and power. In short, it was because Luther's personal, living piety made him the first Christian of the modern world,—the nearest in his walk to Christ and to God—that he was able to become the spiritual guide of these latter generations.

LUTHER'S ORIGINALITY

The genius of Luther again was *original.* He was of the Platonic type of thinkers. His mind was creative. He was not the product, but the

architect of his age. The questions—religious, political and social—that agitated his time, were burned and fused in the glowing fires of his individual experience. "The true history of the world," sagaciously remarks Max Muller, "must always be the history of the few." Without pre-announcement, these great, original characters appear, who change the face of the world. Such an epoch-making personality was Luther. It is often thought that the time was ripe for him. "But," writes James Freeman Clarke, "if the man could have done nothing without the hour, the hour would have passed unless the man had appeared." So wrote the philosopher Schlegel: "The Protestant religion is solely the work and deed of one man, unique in his way, Martin Luther." It was this original, masterful force that gave Luther leadership. His colossal figure is foremost on the field. Statesmen, theologians, generals, bow to his commanding wisdom. The historian Froude, therefore, truly says: "If the Reformation had been led by Zwingli or Carlstadt it would have failed. But that it was able to establish itself was due to the one fact that there existed at the crisis a single person of commanding mind in whose words the bravest and truest saw their own thoughts represented, and that, recognizing him as the wisest among them, he was allowed to impress upon the Reformation his own individuality." And Macaulay makes the point that, owing to his wise and temperate counsels, while Luther lived, peace pre-

vailed and whole nations came over to Protestantism in a day, but, after his death, terrible wars broke out, and Romanism has ever since held at least her territory.

Luther himself felt the original source of his inspirations. As the visions of world-wide revolutions swept before his spirit, he exclaims in awe, "I know not whence these thoughts come to me." Luther's daring initiative thoughts did indeed come from above, but he owed them to no man or age. This claim to originality, like every other, his enemies—and especially the Romanist, Denifle—have disputed. They have tried to show that he borrowed his ideas from preceding reformers who had failed. But Professor Böhmer of Marburg University, who has written the latest life of Luther, which is most remarkable for its prodigious research into the authorities of the Reformation, and also for its profound psychological analysis of Luther, vindicates conclusively his originality. He shows that it is easy to learn the mind of Luther from the copious notes and criticisms he was accustomed to make on the margin of books. And that, while his reading was omnivorous, and he studied with the closest care the mystics, the rationalists, the classics, the humanists, the greatest theologians,—especially his favourite, Augustine,—he fused all their thoughts into his comprehensive brain, and then deduced his own conclusion, never being enslaved by them, but ever maintaining his independent thought. The conception of the

grace of God in Christ, which he grasped, was a rediscovery, and he ever made it his overmastering guide. In fact, his work was not so much a re-formation as a re-creation. It was the central truth of the Gospel, which had been totally lost, that he published to the Christian world.

After this exhaustive inquiry, Professor Böhmer concludes: "While Luther has studied all these systems, the final product is in no way the logical result of these several educational factors, but is something *new* and *original*, something that had never existed before, for the explanation of which one must always again point to a wholly incommensurable quantity: the personal peculiarity of the reformer. Luther's whole course of development is just as original as the result." This originality makes Luther the true creator of the Reformation.

LUTHER'S UNIVERSALITY

A marked trait of Luther was *universality.* He is the most full-orbed historic character. His was a many-sided greatness. "He combined qualities," says Heine, "which we are accustomed to consider irreconcilable antagonisms." "One," says Melancthon, "is a scholar, another a logician, another an orator, but Luther is, all in all, a miracle among men." Says Luthardt: "Depth of feeling and a childlike mind, holy seriousness and playful cheerfulness, an eye which penetrated to the depths of eternity, yet at the same time joyfully tarried with every flower of the field—all were combined in

him. He could wrestle all day with dry Hebrew roots, and in the evening lose his soul in the melodies of his flute under the soft radiance of the stars." He was at once theologian, statesman, poet, musician, naturalist and humorist. Said President Hastings of Union Theological Seminary: "He touched whole spheres of human nature to which Calvin was a stranger." He revered the Fathers, but ridiculed their trivialities. He bowed to antiquity, but divined and welcomed modernity. He loved authority, but championed liberty. He made bold to interpret Scripture in the freedom of its spirit, without disregarding its letter.[1] He saw the fundamental in the doctrine and the indifferent in the form. He was a high, pure idealist, and yet a practical, wise diplomatist. According to Dr. Dorner, in his universal brain he forecasted all the leading questions that have troubled Christendom these four succeeding centuries, and indicated their true solution. "Luther's mind," says Froude, "was literally world-wide; his eyes were forever observ-

[1] A remarkable illustration of the conception of Luther's broadness and freedom of spirit is shown in the great critic Lessing's appeal to Luther, from those who severely condemned him: "Oh, that Luther could judge me! He whom I prefer of all others for my judge! Luther, thou great misunderstood! And by none more misunderstood than by those short-sighted, headstrong men, who, with thy slippers in their hands, saunter, screaming or indifferent, along the path prepared by thee. Thou hast delivered us from the yoke of tradition, who shall deliver us from the more intolerable yoke of the letter! Who shall bring us at last a Christianity such as thou wouldst now teach, such as Christ Himself would teach!"

ant of what was around him. At a time when science was scarcely out of its shell, Luther had anticipated by mere genius the generative functions of flowers; human nature he had studied like a dramatist; his memory was a museum of historical information, scarce a subject on which he had not something remarkable to say."

THE CONSERVATISM OF LUTHER

Luther again was *conservative.* He was no radical. He was not an iconoclast. He respected the traditions of mankind as its greatest storehouse of truth and wisdom. He was not ever running after some new thing. He revered history and the teachings of the past. But how can he be called a conservative, who led the greatest of all revolutions, who overturned the most venerable of all authorities, who gave birth to a new order, and whom Rome therefore brands as the arch-destroyer and heretic? The answer is, that true conservatism does not mean stagnation and blind submission to ancient authority. It recognizes Goethe's maxim: "That which from thy fathers thou dost inherit, be sure thou make thine own." It must prove the past, and it recognizes that the law of life is progress, that there is a world-wide movement in history. It feels with Tennyson:

> "I know that through the ages one unceasing purpose runs
> And the thoughts of men are widening with the process of the suns."

Luther's conservatism was a sane, orderly, progressive one. It claimed, not authority for truth, but truth for authority. Nothing but the dire peril and crisis of Christendom moved him to challenge the historic Church. So, on the eve of the conflict, he wrote humbly to the Pope: "Most holy father, I declare in the presence of God I never have sought to weaken the Romish Church. I confess there is nothing in heaven or earth that should be preferred above that Church, save only Jesus Christ, the Lord of all." The corruptions against which Luther protested are now largely admitted by Romanists, and many of the reforms he demanded Rome herself has since introduced. No, Luther was by nature a conservative. No one hated innovations and contemned fanatics more than he. It was only when driven to the wall, when asked to immolate reason, conscience and the Scriptures, that, to save the life of Christianity, he took up the gauntlet and called the world to arms. It was not Luther, but Rome, who, by answering his just demands with bull and anathema, and by excommunicating him, and millions and nations from her bosom, rent the Christian world in twain.

V

AUTHOR OF CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

LUTHER, further, was an advocate of religious *toleration.* When we remember the universal intolerance of that age, Rome burning Hus at the stake, even the reformer Calvin burning Servetus, and the Church of England a century later keeping the pious dissenter, John Bunyan, twelve years in Bedford Jail, then can we see in Luther here a striking proof of his originality and independence of the trammels of his age. In Canon Mozley's great sermon on Roman Infallibility, he said: "Religious liberty is a point on which Christianity and Civilization speak a common language; they abjure with one mouth force as the property of the Church, and force as applicable to religion at all." Now, let us put by the side of this, Luther. He says: "I will preach, I will talk in private. I will write, but I will not constrain any one, for faith is a voluntary act." Again: "The mass is a bad thing, it ought to be abolished, but let none be torn from it by force. We have a right to speak, but none whatever to compel. If I resort to force, what shall I gain? Grimaces, apings, cramped uniformity and hypocrisy, but there will be no heart sincerity, no faith, no love."

So, too, he protested in stinging rebuke against the persecution of the Jews. Think of the wonder of it! Standing there, four hundred years ago amid the shadows of the Dark Ages, with his enemies brandishing the rack, the stake, and death in his face, Luther cannot be provoked into striking back one blow with the secular arm, but proclaims the iniquity of force in matters of conscience, and asserts the modern principle of religious toleration, just as firmly as does Canon Mozley in the twentieth century addressing the cultured University of Oxford! Well then does the historian D'Aubigne say: "Luther was the first to proclaim the great principles of humanity and religious liberty; he was far beyond his own age, and even beyond many of the reformers in toleration!" So our own historian, Bancroft, writes: "Luther repelled the use of violence in religion. He protested against propagating reform by persecution, and, with a mild moderation, he maintained the sublime doctrine of freedom of conscience." And even the Roman Catholic historian, Michelet, says: "Luther has been the restorer of liberty, and, if we exercise in all its plenitude this highest privilege of human intelligence, it is to him we are indebted for it. To whom do I owe the power of publishing what I am even now writing, except to this liberator of modern thought?" To Luther's breadth and genius, then, are we indebted for the priceless boon of civil liberty and religious tolerance, and although Rome, in a late papal syllabus, has dared to hold these

ominous words, "The Church has the right of employing force," we need not tremble, for the stream of time is too strong for this monstrous claim to resist it. The earth must roll back on its axis before the moral sense of society recants on these questions.

THE MODERNISM OF LUTHER

A note of *modernism* accordingly is characteristic of Luther. This is shown in the striking epigram which Principal Forsyth of Hackney College, London, cites. Luther says: "The truest preceptor, the most conclusive authority, is the thing in itself." "What a modern note that is!" says Forsyth.

In the modern age, we do not so much regard forms, stop at technicalities, or venerate traditions. But it is the inner core and verity of the matter, the essential reality, the absolute right, "the thing in itself" which we want to get at. This is the strength of the modern spirit, a source of our amazing progress.

But it is especially in his treatise on "The Freedom of a Christian Man" that Luther champions the rights of one who has attained joyous and exalted freedom through the grace of Christ, to true independence of soul. In this assertion of man's emancipation from spiritual and political bondage, Luther voices the truth, which is the rallying cry of the modern spirit of civic freedom and democracy. "The Christian man," he says, "is a

priest and king in the kingdom of Christ, and by virtue of this lofty position is, through faith, a free lord over all things and servant to none." In reading this pamphlet, we feel as though it were written in the twentieth century instead of the sixteenth.

We cannot forbear here to quote Professor Dorner's comment on this "Golden Treatise," as he calls it. He says: "It is particularly instructive and refreshing to notice the quiet collectedness of soul, the deep rest and clearness, which Luther maintained at a time when the papal bull of excommunication was hourly impending over his head. This untroubled mirror of a childlike heart, in which the peace of heaven is reflected, stands in wonderful contrast to the storms which gathered around him, and is a proof to all men that the confessor of the righteousness of faith had what he confessed, and was what he taught."

VI

THE MYSTICISM OF LUTHER

WHAT gave intensity, delicacy and beauty to Luther's personality was the tinge of *mysticism* in his religious experience.

In the solitude of his monastic cell he read most sympathetically those powerful and beautiful mystical writers, Eckhardt, Suso and Tauler. And from them he learned how, regardless of all ecclesiastical means, one could, in the secret experiences of his soul, enter into the inner sanctuary of the divine presence. Led by their high spiritual insight, he heard the inaudible, he saw the invisible, he beheld the triune glory. Actually, he tells us, "there were hours when he believed himself to be surrounded by choirs of angels." These ecstatic visions did not desert but strengthened him in the terrible uproar and battle-fields of his life. And yet his strong mental poise kept him from being led into the impractical extremes and fanaticisms which are the mystic's dangerous tendency.

It was Luther's inclination towards a mystical habit of thought, no doubt, that influenced him towards the life of the monastery. His naturally buoyant temper was modified by a strain of melancholy, caused by his disposition to search deeply into the darker, more difficult problems of life.

And as the monastery afforded a greater opportunity for quiet thought, and for the meditative mood fitted to look steadily at these deeper questions, he voluntarily renounced the activities and pleasures of university life, so that like Thomas à Kempis he could say, "The purest happiness in the world is a place of solitude, in a little corner, far from the noises and distractions of society, with a religious book in hand."

Particularly was he influenced by Tauler, the Strasburg "Master of the Holy Scriptures." His "Golden Thoughts on the Higher Life," and other writings, were in Luther's hands. Tauler was one of the safest and most guarded of the mystics. While urging the possibility of close communion of the spirit with the divine, he also warns against a one-sided contemplative life and an impractical quietism. And he counsels his disciples not to lose themselves in lofty, profitless speculations, such as the mystery of "The Triune Being," and other insoluble problems. That Luther had studied Tauler sympathetically is shown by his declaration "that Tauler was indeed unknown in the schools of the theologians, but that he himself had found more genuine and sound theology in him than could be gathered from all the scholastic theologians and universities." [1] So he published an edition of the "German Theology"—an epitome of all the writings of Tauler—and he says in the preface that "he does not know of any theology in either the

[1] Koestlin's "Theology of Luther," Vol. I, p. 123.

Greek or Latin language, which is sounder or in fuller accord with the Gospel." And still further, he affirms that, "next to the Bible and Augustine, no book has fallen under my notice from which I have learned more as to the real nature of God, Christ, man, and all things."

Luther, then, has much in common with the great mystics. Like them, he realized that the heart of piety was communion with the divine. That one should strive to "sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." That there was no bliss in body or soul like that ineffable joy which comes from ascending the mount of holy contemplation, where the spirit may gaze with undimmed vision on "the King in His beauty."

Thus, there was a sensitive religious chord in the soul of Luther that vibrated in responsive harmony with the high celestial strains of such an "angelic doctor" as Suso, the purest and noblest of the mystic singers.

And he had this, further, in common with them, that he held that religion, to be known in its fullness, must be an *experience.* His soul was too anhungered for the divine presence to be satisfied with formal religious rites and monkish routine. He must break through the form and get at the inner spirit. He must know piety in its hidden life and power. He must search the springs of truth and holiness, and drink at the head-waters of grace and life. Hence, in contrast with the hollow, external professionalism about him, which tolerated

many a gross impiety and immorality, Luther saw a far higher type of religionism in the writings of the mystics, and eagerly read them, and was strengthened by them in his longing for genuine, uplifting, transforming piety.

But, while Luther thus owed so much to the mystics, and while they contributed to give an intenser spirituality and beauty to his religious experience, his larger views of religion, his sounder reasoning, and his saner judgment, made him part company from the extravagances into which their one-sidedness often betrayed them. Thus they did not place a proper estimate upon the Holy Scriptures. They were tempted to set an equal or higher value upon their personal experiences. The "inward light," the spiritual vision, the testimony of the natural conscience, was often for them all-sufficient and extreme. They mistook the voice within for the voice without, of God in revelation. They "followed the gleam" of their own souls, instead of seeing the true light of the world. Their religion was a religion not of authority, but of the spirit, such as Sabatier defends. But, as President Warfield of Princeton Seminary says in *The Biblical Review*, April, 1917: "There is a true sense, then, in which it may be said that the unrevealed religions are 'religions of the spirit' and revealed religion is the 'religion of authority.' Authority is the correlate of revelation, and wherever revelation is—and only where revelation is—is there authority. Just because we do not see in revelation man reach-

ing up lame hands towards God and feeling fumblingly after Him if haply he may find Him, but God graciously reaching strong hands down to man, bringing him help in his need, we see in it a gift from God, not a creation of man's. On the other hand, the characteristic of all unrevealed religions is that they are distinctly man-made. They have no authority to appeal to; they rest solely on the deliverances of the human spirit. As Rudyard Kipling shrewdly makes his 'Tommy' declare:

> "'The 'eathen in 'is blindness bows down to wood and stone,
> 'E don't obey no orders unless they is 'is own.'

Mysticism is the name which is given to the particular one of these structures, the predominant place in which is taken by the sensibility. It is characteristic of mysticism that it makes its appeal to the feelings as the sole, or at least as the normative, source of knowledge of divine things."

This is illustrated even in so guarded a mystical writer as Bradford in "The Inward Light," as, for example: "The brightest light is within ourselves—every soul has a Bible—our chief duty in this world is to keep the windows of the soul wide open. We are now face to face with a simple and superb fact: the holiest place for every man is within his own soul. It is more awful than the holy of holies in any temple" (pp. 21–25). And Fenelon, the saintly French mystic, holds almost as strong language:

"We must silence every creature, we must silence ourselves also, to hear in a profound stillness of the soul this inexpressible voice of Christ."

Precious as is the truth in all these views, there is the danger in them of a misplaced and exaggerated emphasis. For when God has spoken, then the true Christian bows to the divine Word as the only absolute truth, and, therefore, authoritative. Luther had found that Word the only light in his dark experiences, the only solace in his soul-trials, the only healing grace for his sins. It was the final voice for him. To its authority he bowed. It was the norm and standard of all his thinking. And no inner light, no mere personal experience, no voice of the natural conscience, could supplant it. He says: "O how great and glorious a thing it is to have the Word of God! He who loses sight of the Word of God falls into despair: the voice of heaven no longer guides and sustains him, he is but the blind leading the blind. But with the Scriptures we have a last and all-sufficient authority, with which we never need fear, or want consolation. For we see before us, in all its lightness and clearness, the only true and right way."

Then, too, the mystics' theory of immediacy, of direct spiritual fellowship with God, made them tend to ignore the Church and the sacramental means of grace. Luther, indeed, did not exalt these to so high a place as was given them by the mediæval Church, but he still held that they were authorized by the Word of God, and that rightly un-

derstood, and observed with faith, they were a blessed and powerful means for upbuilding the spiritual life. Therefore, so far was he from discrediting or ignoring them that he most highly estimated and most devoutly observed them. And he stood for their high place in the plan of salvation with unwavering firmness.

Luther's mysticism then was a guarded, measured and safe one. It had no tendency to be carried into vain delusions, or visionary extravagances. Its simple, practical, religious tendency restrained it from entering into anything like an equal extent with the mystical writers, upon idle speculations. In his pamphlet of the "Babylonian Captivity" he declares that the mystical theology of Dionysius, the Areopagite, is very destructive, promotive of rationalism, more Platonic than Christian; he warns believers not to be led astray by his vagaries, and he closes by saying that "the reader, instead of finding Christ there, will be much more likely to lose Him."

In short, the mysticism of Luther is a sane, sound and healthy one. Whatever is true in its intense personal experience, whatever is beautiful and holy in its contemplative thought, and whatever is gentle, kindly and sweet in its Christlike temper, Luther possessed himself of and joyfully copied, but never lost his anchorage to the authority of the written Word.

VII

LUTHER AND THE FINE ARTS

A SIGNIFICANT feature of the personality of Luther which has left its marked impress especially on the more conservative churches was his sensibility for the *fine arts.* Granite-like as was his character, he had withal an acute feeling for the beautiful, the poetical, the realm of sentiment. Thus, looking out of his window one night, he exclaimed: "The wonderful temple of immensity, with clouds and stars its dome, who sees the pillars on which it stands? And yet it falls not—so let us trust where we cannot see." Again, at sunset, seeing in his garden a bird cozily perched for the night, he soliloquizes: "That little bird—it has nothing to cling to but its tiny twig, while above it are the infinite starry spaces and blue depths of eternity—yet how fearlessly it holds its wings and falls to sleep, while the Maker of all watches over it and gives it too a home." With this poetical inspiration, a taste for the fine arts was naturally linked. He therefore writes: "I am not of the opinion that the arts are to be destroyed by the Gospel, as some of the super-spiritualists contend, but I would like to see all the arts employed in the service of Him

who made them." Of the art of music in particular he says: "Next to theology, I give music the highest honour." And, hearing a fine air one day, he cried in ecstasy: "If our God has shed forth such wondrous gifts on this earth, which is little better than a dark nook, what may we not expect in heaven?" Of the art of sacred painting he writes: "I may for the sake of memory and a better understanding paint the truths of Scripture on the wall." Again, referring to the crucifix, he argues: "When I think, as the Gospel enjoins, of Christ crucified, I must frame before my heart the picture of a man hanging on the cross, and why may I not do it then to my eye, since the heart is of far more importance than the eye?" "This fine answer," says Dr. Dorner, "determines the relation of Protestantism to sacred art." Accordingly, Luther had his friends, the great painters, Albert Durer and Lucas Cranach, by their pencils, advance the truths of the Reformation.

Here Luther laid hold of the profound fact that the fine arts are the handmaidens of religion. This world was not made for bare utility. The azure dome of the sky, broidered and fretted with golden fire, the soft hues of the landscape, the speaking silence of starry midnight, the Gothic arch of the elm and oak, the lily's peerless grace and the gorgeous dyes of the insects' wings—all show beauty to be a thought of God, and write the Eternal's disapproval on the bald spiritualism of Puritanic

theories. Nature is a hieroglyph of God, and artistic, sensible representation translates the divine message. History, too, shows that art was born of religion, for Grecian sculpture arose from making statues of the gods, and architecture has its noblest expression in the mighty rock temples of India, the magnificent pillared structures of Greece, and the splendid cathedrals of Christendom.

Never then let the reaction against Rome carry us, as it did Carlstadt and the ultra-reformers, in spite of Luther's protest, into a false attitude of hostility to sacred art, and let us make our churches eloquent with religious symbolism, so that the sanctuary may be a sacred arcanum, a Christian holy of holies, a gate beautiful, leading by ascending steps to the glory of the heavenly temple.

Protestants often wonder at the hold which the Roman Catholic Church has upon her people, and how faithful her members are to their obligations. The secret is largely found in their application of the psychology of sacred art in their worship. While a Romanistic service certainly lacks the vitality, direct interest and instructiveness of a Protestant one, and strikes us as ritualistic and even pantomistic, yet this one point is enforced. Every feature of the architecture, of the altar and the environments, as well as the liturgic services, symbolizes religion. Reverence is voiced by every appeal to ear and eye. We feel that we are verily in the House of Prayer, that we bow before the throne of the Holy of Holies. Especially

does this symbolism make its lasting mark in the impressionable period of youth. This is a lesson which Protestantism must learn if it would hold the rising generation.

VIII

LUTHER AND WAR

LUTHER'S vision was so world-wide that he has surveyed and passed judgment upon nearly every experience of man and society. Thus, he has expressed his views very definitely upon peace and war, a consideration of which is most *apropos* in the present mighty struggle of nations.

Treitschke once ascribed to Luther a certain "idealism of war." Such an idealism, in the sense in which Moltke and Treitschke himself advocated it, cannot be found in Luther's thought or expression. The idea of these militarists is that war is good and useful to develop the noblest virtues of man. Moltke wrote that war is useful because it cultivates the qualities of "courage and self-denial, loyalty to duty and willingness to sacrifice"; and he maintained that "without wars the world would be completely lost in materialism and would become a veritable wilderness so far as morals are concerned." Luther's idea of war was altogether different. It is true Luther spoke of war as "an element in God's plan for the universe." But in the foreground of Luther's reasoning on the subject always stood the idea that war is a necessary

evil, a matter of misery and woe. Nowhere does he say that war ennobles the warrior or advances the race. It is nothing but a bitter and inexorable necessity.

Professor Walther of Rostock, perhaps the foremost living Luther scholar, has summarized Luther's thoughts under the title "The Present War and Dr. Luther." The Reformer is made to speak in clear terms on the following subjects: "Is War Justifiable? Sacrifice in War Times. Prayer in Times of War. War that is Just, and War that is Sinful."

Here is Luther's argument in favour of a war that is a righteous one:

"What else is war than the punishment of wrong and evil? Why does a person go to war except to secure peace and obedience? Although it may not appear to the superficial view that killing and robbing are a work of love appropriate to Christian hands, nevertheless in reality it is a work of love. For example, a good physician may find a disease so virulent and wide-spread that he must cut off a hand, a foot, an ear, or an eye in order to save the whole body. If one should regard only the member that is cut off, the physician might seem to be an atrocious, merciless man. But if one regards the body that he has saved, it is clear that the physician is a true and faithful man and has performed a good Christian deed. Likewise, if I think of war, how it punishes the wicked, kills the unjust, and causes all manner of misery, I may be disposed to regard

it as a most unchristian work and quite contrary to Christian love. But if I consider how it protects the good, preserves and defends wife and child, house and home, goods and honour and peace, then I see how precious and divine a work it is and I observe that it is nothing more than the amputation of a leg or a hand in order that the entire body may not be destroyed. For if the sword did not defend us and preserve the peace everything in the world would be lost in turmoil. Therefore we may say that war is nothing but a short lapse of the peace which preserves us against eternal and endless turmoil, nothing but a small misfortune, which spares us the necessity of an infinitely greater misfortune."

From this it will be seen that Luther was not a pacifist, opposed to war under all circumstances. And, as he was so vigorous a fighter in the religious sphere all his life, some one has called him the Roosevelt of the Reformation. But Luther must ever be heard on both sides. And so it will be seen that he is no militarist either. For he finds the ultimate ground and highest motive for war in love. What is contrary to love in waging war is contrary to God's will, even though Scripture passages may be wrested to uphold it. But when love demands that a man fight for the right, it becomes his sacred duty so to fight. Only when Christian love is the impelling motive can a man's fight for the right be called a Christian fight. No Christian can regard any war as justifiable unless it

is understood to be a duty imposed by love. But when so understood it is not only justifiable, it is a sacred duty. "All that God commands and desires is love." This is applicable to nations, as well as individuals.

Luther's teachings as to war and peace are thus seen to be profoundly wise and truly Christian. If only wars were waged under the dictate of love, and if misrepresentation of motives, falsification of facts, and unselfish aims—as Luther claims—were eliminated from war, rulers and nations would be far slower to engage in it than now.

IX

LUTHER AND THE HOME

NO picture of a rare personage is complete without a sketch of his home-life. Here we see his truest self. The home-life of Luther was exquisitely beautiful. Professor Prentiss, in a symposium held by the faculty of Union Theological Seminary on the four hundredth anniversary of Luther's birth [in 1883], presented a remarkable paper on "Luther and the Children," in which he says that "Luther stands alone of all public men in history for his tender sympathy with childhood." The artist, Koenig, has drawn the picture with which we are familiar. It is Christmas Eve. The tapers on the tree are burning brightly, showing those wonderful angels, stars, trumpets, birds and dolls which Christmas trees alone can bear. Luther sits in the center, his wife leaning happily on his shoulder, the larger children playing about, the babe with its little nightcap kept up for the scene. Luther's home was his Bethany, where innocent joy, love and peace recuperated him for life's fierce battles. He kept open-house. Theologians, students and friends were guests every day around his board. His *Table Talk*, recorded by a friend, abounds in pious reflections,

pithy sayings and pointed aphorisms and maxims, lighted by his keen flashes of wit and humour. Dr. Matthews, in his ingenious essay on great conversers, says: "Luther was one of the most charming talkers of the age. His conversations abound in those illuminated thoughts that cast a light as from a painted window on every theme." On reading *The Table Talk* Froude exclaims: "One ceases to wonder how this single man could change the face of Europe. There is no such table talk in literature." This urbanity and *Gemüthlichkeit* shed genial warmth on the entire home circle. Daily he discoursed with his children a clause of the catechism. Nowhere is revealed the sublime repose of his soul in God as in the inimitable letter to his little son, Hans, describing heaven as a fairy garden, which he wrote from Coburg, in one of the stormiest and most danger-girded hours of his life. The unutterable tenderness of this lion-like heart was shown when he stood beside the dead form of his favourite child, Magdalene, of thirteen summers. After gazing long and fixedly at her pallid face, he said slowly: "Yes, dear child, thou shalt rise again and shalt shine as the sun! Farewell, thou lovely star; we shall meet again." All life long he showed the effect of this blow.

Luther's peaceful death, in the little town of Eisleben, where he was born, asserting his triumphant faith and uttering our Lord's last words: "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit," was a fitting close of his extraordinary career. As the

body was borne in imperial state from Eisleben to Wittenberg, whole cities came out to join the procession, and a voice of grief resounded through Christendom. All felt that a mighty soul had passed, such as long ages should come and go before the world would look upon again.

Fitly is this extraordinary life characterized in the remarkable tribute of Thomas Carlyle: "I will call this Luther a true Great Man, great in intellect, in courage, affection and integrity; one of our most lovable and precious men. Great, not as a hewn obelisk; but as an Alpine mountain,—so simple, honest, spontaneous, not setting up to be great at all; there for quite another purpose than being great! Ah yes, unsubduable granite, piercing far and wide into the Heavens; yet in the clefts of it fountains, green beautiful valleys with flowers! A right spiritual Hero and Prophet; once more, a true Son of Nature and Fact, for whom these centuries, and many that are to come yet, will be thankful to Heaven."[1]

[1] "Heroes and Hero Worship," p. 372.

X

LUTHER'S FAULTS

WHAT of Luther's faults? Were there no blemishes to this fascinating picture? Was there not a reverse side to this character, blending in it such a mosaic of admirable and even romantic qualities? As no man was ever so adored by his admirers so no one has been more bitterly hated, and none at whom have been hurled such grievous charges.

Hence, no inquiry into his personality is complete or impartial which will not examine these.

He is accused of being *inconsistent.* Does he not often contradict himself, and cannot directly opposite views be gathered from his writings? In his teaching as to free-will and predestination: the definite separation and yet interrelation of Church and State: as to the necessity of the Church and her means of grace, and yet the individual approach to God, independent of all ecclesiastical trammels: as to the absolute authority of the Scriptures, and yet the right of the Christian conscience to test them for itself; and on similar points cannot many of his positions be faced with pointblank opposite citations from his own writings? This is no doubt to some extent true. But Luther's inconsistency is

only such as, for example, attaches to the Bible. There, too, we can find statements which seem directly to efface one another. If one takes isolated texts, almost any cause, as authority and liberty, war and peace, Sabbath observance and freedom, prohibition and temperance, can be proven. So, Life is full of contradictions. Nature, so suffused with wonder, benevolence and charm, is subject to John Stuart Mill's terrific arraignment. Hegel postulates truth itself as the final result of two seemingly opposed truths,—positive and negative—harmonized into a third greater and absolute.

Such is the inconsistency of great natures, and such was Luther's. He wore his heart on his sleeve. He never troubled himself as to the consistency of his utterances. When he was writing on the theme of the hour, he expressed himself with the most impulsive intensity. At another time, when the situation demanded the opposite truth, he uttered just as strongly the contrary ethical lesson. But he was only expressing the many-sidedness of religion. And on any one point, all his utterances must be compared. He cannot be judged from isolated passages. And thus tried, it will be found that his seeming contradictions only set forth truth in its generic and many-sided relations. Luther's apparent inconsistency, then, but results from his largeness of vision, his capacity not to be misled by the narrow and particular, but to see the wide and universal.

The rigid, logical consistency of small, narrow,

mechanical minds has often led to the grossest inconsistencies and to the most frightful orgies of blood and stake. This largeness of Luther's nature, despite the seeming contradictions which it sometimes involves, we believe was one of the singular excellencies of his character. Thus Hamann, the Roman Catholic critic, speaking of the charge of inconsistency made against Luther, remarks that great and powerful personalities are always inclined to paradoxes, and so he delighted in Luther's exaggerations, his harshnesses, and his contradictions.

One of the defects most frequently urged against Luther is that he had an *unpleasant and severe temper*. That he struck back furiously at his foes. That with his power of conviction and resources of wit and humour, his outbursts were flame-tipped, there can be no doubt. Yet when we consider the bitter style of theological discussion in that age, Luther's fierce invectives are gentle compared with the coarseness of Henry VIII's abuse of him. And when we remember the fierce papal anathemas hurled daily at him, denouncing him as a child of Satan, and consigning him to the lowest hell, it is not to be wondered at if the giant, roused to frenzy, used epithets of rage and contempt that strike us as intemperate. That is a natural tendency of deeply impassioned titanic personalities, engaged in a world-wide struggle.

On the other hand, manifold are the testimonies to the sweetness and winsomeness of Luther's character: as the portraiture of his geniality and hu-

mour at Duke George's banquet given at the Eck discussion; also the charming narrative of the merchants and students who were entertained by him *incognito*, at the inn, the rainy night in Jena. But the most significant testimony was that of Melancthon, who was Luther's contrast in vacillation and tendency to compromise, and whom Luther had severely to rebuke so often to save the Reformation, yet never did he break with him in friendship, and said Melancthon in his funeral oration: "Every one who knew him well must bear witness to the fact that he was a very kind man, gracious in all his words, friendly, and charming and not at all bold, impetuous, headstrong or quarrelsome. His heart was true and without guile."

Mosellan, one of the scholars of Leipsic, who came to know Luther personally at the time of the disputation there, says of him in a letter to a friend: "In his life he is kindly and courteous. There is nothing stoical or supercilious about him. He knows how to conduct himself under all circumstances. In society he is always bright and cheerful, however direful the threats of his enemies. So that it would be hard to believe that this man could undertake such serious things without the favour of God." The same kind of testimony comes from a multitude of other witnesses, people who were personally acquainted with the man, Luther. The picturesque element of his character, the biting force of his words, and the dauntless courage of his deeds, while they condemned him severely among

his enemies, nevertheless commended him the more heartily to his friends. "Throughout his public life Luther manifested a capacity for personal friendship, a talent for binding men to himself by strong personal ties, that is unique among the great reformers and with few parallels in history."[1] And Professor Böhmer in the latest life of him, just issued, speaks of "his delicate affection, friendliness and paternal mildness, which this powerful man otherwise exhibited towards so many worthy and unworthy persons."

Luther himself, when confronted with his books at Worms, admitted that in his controversial writings he had often exhibited an intemperance of severity, for which he was willing humbly to apologize. At another time he says in defense of this roughness: "My own writings are like a wild forest, compared with the gentle, limpid fluency of his (Brenz's) language. If small things dare be compared with great, my words are like the spirit of Elijah—a great and strong wind, rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks; and his is the 'still small voice.' But yet God uses also coarse wedges for splitting coarse blocks; and besides the fructifying grain, He employs also the rending thunder and lightning to purify the atmosphere. I must root out the stumps and trunks, and I am a rough woodsman who must break the road and prepare it; but Magister Philip (Melancthon) goes on quietly and gently, plows and plants, sows

[1] Professor Wentz's "Four Centuries of Luther."

and waters joyfully." But at other times he did not seem to feel this apologetic spirit. For, speaking of his occasional outbursts of polemical violence, he says: "Righteous anger against God's enemies is the duty of a Christian. I never work so well, or am so able to exercise energy, or achieve such success, as when I am angry. It dissipates my apathy, and calls out all my powers." After all it was the Luther, aflame with righteous anger, who alone was able to face an embattled papal power. But so universal and emphatic is the testimony, that it is conclusively established that Luther was not, as often represented, severe, unpleasant and coarse, but that contrariwise he was of a remarkably affable spirit, bright, kindly, buoyant and witty, a charming companion, a most genial personality.

But was not Luther guilty of *uncharitableness* in the dispute with Zwingli at Marburg? And did not his uncompromising position there cause the divergence of Protestantism into two camps?—an evil felt deeply to our day. In considering this, we must remember the wise caution essential to the success of so revolutionary and far-reaching a movement as the Reformation. Carlstadt, and his school, had already committed violent excesses, and the mighty, compact organization of Rome took advantage of these abuses to prophesy the speedy dissolution of Protestantism.

Luther, then, standing at the fountain head, must, above all things, be on his guard against a destructive radicalism. He believed that in quite empty-

ing the sacrament of its Scriptural and historic force as a means of grace, there lay the germ of rationalism, and accordingly he felt compelled to reject Zwingli's extended hand. The greatest theologians believe that Luther's firmness at Marburg saved the Reformation. And the fact that the largest churches of Protestantism, the more conservative, with their higher theories of the sacraments, are also the most vigorous and progressive ones, strengthens his attitude as not uncharitable, but wisely judicious.

But did not Luther believe in a *personal devil*, in a literal hell, in demoniacal possessions, sorcerers, hobgoblins and witches? And did he not thereby evince a superstitious weakness unworthy of a great personality? That Luther had some such beliefs is undeniable. Especially did he believe in Satan as the head of these evil spirits. They are but his emissaries, working everywhere to tempt and mislead, and to inflict hurts and miseries upon men, women and children.

Particularly was the Pope, and also the papal tools with their plots and malignant schemes, under his control.

However, it is to Luther's credit that he had no fear of even Satan himself, and when he assailed him with a great temptation, he would fell him with a mighty word of Scripture, or even hurl his inkstand at him, and it was with a joyful feeling of triumph that he saw the malicious old fiend flee from his holy wrath in terror.

No doubt he meant literally his famous saying: "Though there be as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the roofs of the houses, yet will I go thither."

But on the other hand, Luther believed in beneficent spirits, who went to and fro, doing the Almighty's will on the earth. He felt that, with Elisha, in the great battle with the ungodly, he was surrounded by an invisible host of chariots and horses of fire. He believed, too, that every Christian has his guardian angel.

But as to this charge against Luther, we must remember that notable saying of Goethe: "Superstition is the heritage of energetic and noble natures." Again, says the philosopher Bacon: "Every superstition is the shadow of a great truth." Men gifted with exceptional spiritual insight see deeper into that strange mystery of light and darkness, good and evil, God and Satan, than do others. And unless our Gospels are altogether unreliable, our Lord believed in a personal devil.

And were we to take literally the assertions of Lloyd George and Bethman von Hollweg, we would have to believe that there were some German and English demoniacal possessions even to-day.

And we must bear in mind also that in Luther two ages, Mediævalism and Modernism, met. And we could not expect him altogether to emancipate himself from the most ingrained traditions of his time, and had he done so, he would have been separated too far from his contemporaries for them

to have followed him. But even in this matter of superstition, Luther was far ahead of his age, and history shows that he was personally more enlightened than the majority of the educated class of that time. He ridiculed with the keenest sarcasm many of the magic arts, exorcisms and sorceries in vogue, and by his telling blows did more to impair the reign of superstition than any of his contemporaries.

Romanists have even assailed Luther's *private* life and *morals* with furious violence. They have charged him with the grossest vices. They have called him,—we quote—"a drunkard, glutton, pornographer, forger and liar." To show the proof on which such calumnies rest, Denifle cites Luther's words, viz.: "I am not now drunk or indiscreet," which he calls a confession of habitual drunkenness. But he fails to cite the whole passage, for it continues: "Christ was not drunk when He spoke the sacramental words of the Holy Eucharist, God is not drunk, the evangelists are not drunk." So, according to Denifle's argument, Luther would confess Christ and God and the evangelists to be habitually given to intoxication. Luther merely meant by this strong metaphor to emphasize the well-weighed and sober discretion of his words.

Luther did indeed take his glass of good wine with relish, after the manner of his time, and even after the manner of some of us in our times who are not yet converted to absolute prohibition. But, as a matter of fact, "in speech and writing, Luther

fought drunkenness more vehemently than any German of his day." Luther's contemporaries attest that coarse as was his age, he was ever chaste and pure in his words. And as a rule he was abstemious in his diet, often only eating a little bread and a herring, and once when intensely absorbed in study, refusing a mouthful for four whole days. Nothing is a greater concession to an enemy's strength and rectitude than when that last and meanest attack is resorted to, slander and abuse. Far more creditable is the admission of the Roman Catholic Dollinger, who says, "I see in Luther a great and noble character against whose person I would not cast a stone."

Luther's faults then by no means appear to have been exceptional. He had no greater defects than might be expected in a character of elemental strength, called upon to battle with colossal forces and living in a rude and stormy age. So bitter were the animosities of the time that the slanders uttered against Luther were so numberless and incredible that he and his friends could but ignore them. And yet, through constant repetition, many of them have come to be believed.

But searching historical criticism has not alone refuted them, but shown that Luther's greatness and piety raised him above all but very few faults. His defects were indeed insignificant, and no more blur his portrait than the spots darken the sun. His errors, such as he did have, illustrate that epigram of Goethe. "Man's errors make him lovable."

"We do not love the admirable paragons. The note of absolute consistency is formidable in any man, and in a woman terrible."

The unanimous testimony of Luther's associates is to his big-heartedness, urbanity, kindliness, gayety of spirits, and that his sparkling wit and humour were playful and not satirical. The verdict then of mankind as to Luther's faults is rather that remarkable one of Lessing: "In such reverence do I hold Luther that I rejoice in having been able to find some defects in him, for I have been in danger of making a god of him. The proofs that in some things he was like other men are to me as precious as the most dazzling of his virtues."

XI

WHAT THE WORLD OWES LUTHER

TO realize what mankind owes to Luther for the work of the Reformation, we must look at what the world was when he threw down his challenge to the existing sacerdotal system, and compare it with the world as it has been and is, since.

Although the formula of Papal Infallibility was not officially declared until the Vatican Council in 1870, yet it was recognized as fully existent. This investiture gave the Pope the absolute right to interpret Holy Scripture. Once his decree had gone forth, the decision must be universally accepted as inerrant. This practically placed an embargo upon Scriptural exegesis. When the meaning of disputed passages was not to be decided by linguistic, historical and critical tests, what use for the study of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and the investigation of manuscripts, and Scriptural learning? Consequently very little attention was given to searching out the true meaning, and opening up the fountains of Scriptural truth.

Moreover, as the right of "private judgment" was denied, and as all interpretation was in the hands of Pope and priests, the individual Christian

felt that he was in danger of committing sacrilege if he went to the Word of God for himself. Under these conditions, it is not to be wondered at that the circulation of the Holy Scriptures was neither encouraged nor facilitated, so that practically the Bible was excluded from the possession of the people. There could be no stronger illustration of this than the surprise and joy of a brilliant student like Luther, when one day he found an entire copy of the Bible chained to a shelf in the university. And so, later, "the Bible in the hands of the laity" became his powerful slogan.

Now when we remember that "the entrance of Thy Word giveth light," and compare the hundreds of languages into which the Bible is translated in our day, the circulation of copies by millions, as the leaves of the forests, the cheap editions which the poorest can purchase, and the free distribution, we see the change wrought by the Reformation, through Luther's demand that every one's right and duty were to read and interpret the sacred volume for himself. We cannot expect Christians to be such in deed and in truth unless they are informed and transformed by those Scripture truths which our Lord declares are "spirit and are life." And this one fact explains the far greater Scriptural intelligence of Protestant Christians and the true spirituality which characterizes their piety.

But again the Romish Church had abused the claim to infallibility for ecumenical councils and popes, by the teaching of false doctrine, corrupting

the pure gospel teaching. By this perversion of the truth, she clouded the minds of Christians and *obstructed the way of life.* These errors taught by the Church were partly the result of ignorance, and partly the lust for authority and power.

A primary one of these errors was that to the Church alone belonged the forgiveness of sins. The next step was that the Church could use this power over the souls and consciences of men to promote her own selfish and temporal interests. Thus came about what can truly be termed the infamous sale of indulgences. For money, then, sins great and small, sins past, present and even in the future [the bold purveyors of them often proclaimed], would be pardoned.

To strike at this pernicious traffic was Luther's chief intent in nailing up his ninety-five theses, the twenty-first of which ran: "Therefore do the preachers of indulgences err when they say that by the papal indulgence a man is released and saved from all punishment." And in the twenty-seventh he delivers one of his cutting blows thus: "They preach human folly who pretend that as soon as the money cast into the chest clinks, the soul escapes." And then Luther went on in these theses to declare that the Lord Jesus Christ had paid on the cross the full penalty of human sins, and that therefore any soul was freely justified. All that was needed was penitence and faith. Thus was opened up again the way of life which had been clogged and barred by penances and in-

dulgences and ritualistic formalities and meaningless rites, until it was almost impossible to find it.

And the freedom, the simplicity, the confidence and the joy Christians now have in the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith alone, opening to them a new view and way of life, they owe to the blessed Reformation under Martin Luther.

The blessings of a *free state*, and of *civil and religious liberty*, are another heritage the world owes to Luther, through the Reformation. In the Middle Ages the Church, through her claim to the spiritual primacy of St. Peter, asserted her right to dominate the State. No sovereign could ascend the throne without her investiture, and through her bull of excommunication she could, at pleasure, release his subjects from their allegiance. Thomas Aquinas sought to show that "submission to the Roman pontiff is necessary to every human being."

And how this principle was reduced to practice is shown by Henry IV of Germany pleading, bareheaded and cold, for three days at the castle of Canossa for Pope Gregory VII to restore his forfeited crown. So King John of England, in 1213, after a losing struggle with Pope Innocent, laid his realm at the feet of the Pope's legate, "to receive it back as a fief from Rome." In his pledge he decrees "the concession of the kingdoms of England and Ireland with all their rights and appurtenances to our mother the Holy Roman Church, and to our Lord Pope Innocent and his Catholic successors, receiving and holding them as it were a vassal

from God and the Roman Church, we swear fealty." [1]

How fatal so preposterous a claim to freedom on the part of the State! How impossible under such a *régime* the development of mankind in the art of representative civil government! No wonder that under such a system there developed in Europe iron-clad autocracies in which the rights of the common people were utterly ignored. That all power, wealth, utilities and ownership of land, were held by a very few. That the princes, nobles and great families led lives of absolute ease, selfishness, indifference to the welfare of communities, and spent most of their time in revelry and vice. And that the masses of the peasants possessed no rights that their harsh lords were bound to respect, and were doomed to lives of hopeless poverty, ignorance and misery.

It was these wrongs and these unrighteous conditions that made the great heart of Luther bleed with sympathy, and that fired his courageous soul with hot indignation. In the boldest terms he challenges the claims of the Church to dominate the State, and proves from the Scriptures that her kingdom is not of this world, and that she must confine her sovereignty to the spiritual sphere. And in his "Address to the German Nobility," he reproves the princes for their tyrannies and vices, and threatens them with an outbreak of divine vengeance, like one of the prophets of the Old

[1] "The Political Theories of Martin Luther," Waring, p. 17.

Testament. At the same time he pleads the cause and rights of the peasantry in the strongest terms.

And it was only under the colossal and continuous blows of Luther that these unscriptural and destructive claims of the Church were relegated to the Dark Ages, and that there resulted the modern Free State. Hence the boon of civil liberty, the cause of human rights, the welfare and happiness of the masses, and the signs of the coming rule of Democracy everywhere, are our debt to Luther and his contemporaries alone.

And the same is true with respect to *religious liberty.* The pages of history are crimson with the blood that has been shed for conscience sake. The noblest saints, and those whose characters have shed the rarest lustre upon our race, have suffered the severest persecutions, and been broken on the wheel, or burned at the stake, for the only reason that they "feared God rather than man." The fires of martyrdom have lit up with a lurid glare the horizon from the days of the primitive Christian persecutions down to the sixteenth century. And even later, in France, England, Switzerland, etc., this spirit of intolerance led to barbarous executions.

And it was alone owing to the inflexible stand taken by the German princes whom Luther's powerful personality had won to his support, that he himself escaped death. But from that era, religious liberty has prevailed in Germany, and thence has spread throughout all Protestantism.

No more burnings of a heroine saint, Joan of Arc, or of a preacher of the pure Gospel, John Hus, or of a noble Archbishop Cranmer, or exile of the Quakers from their native land, for conscientious religious convictions. Every man now can hold such religious belief as he pleases and worship God as he thinks right "sitting under his own vine and fig-tree, none daring to molest or make them afraid."

And for this most inestimable prerogative of the human soul, that which affects more than every other his happiness and peace—religious liberty—enjoyed in these later ages, in all its fullness, we can thank none other than the indomitable hero of the Reformation.

A *Scriptural conception of the Church* was another rediscovery of Luther. His studies of the Post-Apostolic era and the primitive Church showed that its office had been perverted from its original purpose. The Church was designed to help, guide and strengthen the believer in the Christian life. But, under the prevalent conception of Luther's time, it had taken the place of Christ, and stood between the believer and his Lord and Saviour.

The great theologian, Schleiermacher, thus defines the diverse theories held by Luther and his papal opponents: "According to the Romish conception the soul can only come to Christ through the Church, whereas, according to the Protestant doctrine, the soul is led through Christ to the Church."

When, through the Word, the believer has found Christ, then the Church tenderly nurtures within him the new spiritual life. Luther by no means depreciated the Church and her legitimate sphere and authority. Contrariwise, he laid great stress upon the importance of the Church with her Word and Sacraments as the means of grace. By this Scriptural, Protestant interpretation, the Church becomes, instead of an obstacle in the path of the seeker, a living shepherd to nurture and strengthen him in the way of salvation.

An important practical result of the Reformation is the *change wrought in Public Worship.* It had, with the predominance given to the priest, and with the abnormal authority lodged in him, been taken almost wholly from the congregation. The officiating clergy conducted the service mostly himself. And the part of the people consisted chiefly in routine formulas and inane repetitions. And, as the service was conducted in the Latin tongue, and not understood by the people, there was very little intelligent and real worship in it. Besides the sacraments, with their forgiveness and grace, being in the power of the priests, they reduced the preaching of the Word to a very secondary place.

But Luther changed all this. And, by having the service in the vernacular tongue, and setting aside many of the meaningless and burdensome repetitions, and encouraging the congregations to join in the popular hymns he wrote for them, the

service was simplified, it was made natural instead of artificial, and inspired and enthused by Christian song, the worship of the sanctuary became free, spontaneous, joyous and helpful.

Then Luther brought into the forefront the *prophetic office of the ministry*. *Preaching*, from being almost neglected, was given the chief place in the service. The art of preaching was again studied, effective preachers and expounders of the Holy Scriptures were sought after, and the churches were filled with ardent listening congregations. The liturgies of the past, and the usages of the universal Church, freed from corruptions, were retained, and the Protestant form of worship became an ideal one. This distinction, and this superior simplicity, directness and popularity characterize, to a greater or less extent, all the branches of Protestantism.

The *Worship of the Saints*, which had become one of the greatest abuses and most universal practices of the Church, was rejected. Luther tells us that "it took him twenty years to emancipate himself from the delusion of the perfect holiness and power of the intercession of the saints," so deeply had this fallacy been ingrained in him. Then he at last learned "to test even the holy fathers whom he so much revered, as Sts. Augustine, Jerome and Francis, by the Gospel of Christ, and he found them fallible men."

Hence suppliants were taught that the worship of the saints was contrary to the teaching of Scrip-

ture and to the usage of the primitive Church, and was an act of sacrilege. And, instead of going to the saints, who themselves needed intercession, the petitioner was sent direct to Christ, who, possessed of all power in heaven and upon earth, and sitting at the right hand of the Father, Himself presents our prayers to the Almighty Throne.

Luther, moreover, gave us the true ideal of *a Christian Home.* He protested against the false notion that God could only be served by celibacy and retirement from the world into a cloister. He held matrimony to be God's order and that of nature, and that therefore it was "a holy estate." Hence he protested against the monks and nuns shutting themselves away from the active service of men and living at the expense of the community. And he held that it was desirable that the clergy should marry, and be familiar with the cares and duties, and also be recuperated by the pleasures of the domestic sphere. And Luther, himself, set the example of a charming and happy family life. Thus he glorified the Christian Home. And, in contending that the humblest peasant could serve God and the Church and society by fidelity in his lowly calling, as well as princes on their thrones, he upraised and sanctified the duties of common life.

Roman Catholics, intelligent and pious, will contest this picture of mankind's debt to Luther and Protestantism. The author's friend, the accomplished Dr. James J. Walsh, in his very able and fascinating volume, "The Thirteenth the Greatest

of Centuries," cites this eloquent description from the historian, Frederick Harrison: "This great century, the last of the true Middle Ages, which as it drew to its own end gave birth to Modern Society, has a special character of its own, that gives it an enchanting and abiding interest. It was in nothing one-sided, and in nothing discordant. There was one common creed, one ritual, one worship, one sacred language, one Church, a single code of manners, a uniform scheme of society, a common system of education, an accepted type of beauty, a universal art,—something like a recognized standard of the Good, the Beautiful and the True. Men utterly different from each other, all profoundly accepted one common order of ideas, and could all feel that they were all together working out the same task" (p. 12).

This is a beautiful ideal, and such a universality and unity have a surpassing charm for all, especially for conservative minds and cultured tastes. But, unfortunately, it is an ideal that cannot be realized until humanity is much more highly developed than anything we can conceive of now. As mankind is constituted at present, such a harmony would be that of stagnation, such a unity can only be that of suppression, such a peace but that of death. It utterly lacks the breadth, the movement, the diversities, the activities and the inspirations of life. That the gains of Protestantism have not been made without some regrettable losses cannot be denied. The unity of the Roman

Catholic Church has many advantages over the divisions of Protestantism, but the price required to be paid for it far outweighs the gain. The right of private judgment and the individual freedom of the Christian often lead to a hurtful disregard of the necessity and proper authority of the Church.

It is a sad truth, exemplified a thousand times by history, that liberty is liable to abuse. The larger privileges men enjoy, to the greater dangers and fallacies are they exposed. A strong government prevents disorder, but it is also hostile to free growth. In Protestantism we do suffer from the vagaries of individualism, and the large range accorded to congregations and pastors is sometimes taken advantage of by sensational methods and fanatical evangelists, by which means the Church is injured and the influence of religion weakened with intelligent and sensible people.

But these are disadvantages inseparable from the exercise of individual and ecclesiastical freedom. And they are not for a moment to be set over against the inestimable blessings of civil and religious liberty procured by the Reformation. Romanism has indeed the solid unity, the strength, the massiveness and the immobility of a mighty fortress, but Protestantism is rather a majestic tree, its springing branches swaying freely in the winds of heaven, instinct with energy, virility and growth —a Tree of Life.

Genius and the iron hand can no more harmonize than Napoleon and Madame de Staël could live

within the boundaries of the same France. The spirit of man, to attain its loftiest flights, must have unclipped wings and unwalled skies. It is better to tolerate the vagaries of genius by giving it the open, than to stifle its powers within the bars of a prison. Besides, if great wrongs have been perpetrated, and dangerous heresies held in the name, and through the exercise of liberty, how multitudinous and woeful have been the tyrannies, the persecutions, the repressions, and the outrages committed by authority? The bloodiest chapters of the world's history record its monstrous enormities. And the experience and wonderful progress of the past four centuries have given incontestable proof that it is only when the human mind is unfettered by ecclesiastical and civil tyranny that the race advances most rapidly upon the path of achievement, happiness and prosperity.

So it is to the work of Luther in the Reformation that we live in a new world. In passing from the Middle Ages to this modern period, mankind has left behind it darkness, and entered upon an era of light.

On every hand we see civilization taking greater strides. Absolute freedom of investigation has given an immense impulse to science. Schools and universities and specialized studies abound on an unprecedented scale. Government, not by and for the privileged few, but "of the people, by the people, and for the people," is rapidly becoming universal. Religion, relieved of cramped uniform-

ity, is more spiritual, vigorous, joyous and true. The missionary spirit is bearing abroad the Gospel to the nations, near and afar.

In short, no such a wondrous transformation in the condition of the race, no such a new epoch in civilization, no such a forward step in the march of the human mind, and no such a revolution in the destinies, uplift and happiness of mankind, have been introduced by any single personality in the world's history as that by Luther in the work of the Reformation.

Yet Luther's mighty task is far from being completed. Vast is the responsibility that rests upon the Christendom of the twentieth century to carry it forward. Luther has made a merely external Church and a merely formalistic religion forever impossible. But a spiritual religion, charged with living energy and power, propagated by a Church preaching the pure Gospel of Christ, and winning the world to God,—that is our ideal and our aim. And the larger the blessings of the Reformation, and the richer the possibilities in it for the uplift and happiness of the world, the greater should be our devotion, enthusiasm and sacrifice.

XII

AMERICA'S DEBT TO LUTHER

WHILE all civilized peoples share Luther's heritage, yet especially here in America have we fallen heir to it. The principles of human freedom for which he battled have been embodied in our institutions as in no other country. This is particularly true as to the separation of Church and State. Luther found the State dominated by the Church. He showed that the sphere of the one was spiritual, and that of the other temporal, and that each was supreme in its own sphere alone. And that to preserve each from injury, neither should encroach upon the sphere of the other.

Writes Koestlin,[1] "By Luther's entire conception of the nature of the Church and ecclesiastical authority, every extension of that authority as divinely ordained, to the sphere of temporal, political, or civil life, was excluded." So, conversely, he bluntly told the most powerful and arrogant civil rulers that they should keep their hands off the preparation of confessions and statements of religious doctrines, as being exclusively the business of the Church's theologians.

[1] "Luther," Vol. I, p. 308.

We can have no better illustration of the practical outcome of Luther's principles respecting Church and State than the contrast between the colonists at Plymouth Rock and the Swedes, settled on the Delaware by the great Lutheran king, Gustavus Adolphus.

The former, although flying to escape religious intolerance, were soon persecuting Quakers and differing religionists as severely as they themselves had suffered. Contrariwise, the charter of King Adolphus's American colony, confirmed by all the authorities of the kingdom, specially guaranteed freedom of worship for those of divergent confessions. In this Lutheran king's scheme of colonization, all were invited to enjoy the blessings of a free state. Though a Lutheran colony, supported by a Lutheran government, the other colonists had peace and equal protection in it from the beginning, and when the Quakers came, they were at once and freely welcomed on the same free principles, as also were the representatives of the Church of England.

But chiefly does America owe to Luther her peerless prize of civil liberty.

When Luther made his famous stand at Worms for the rights of the individual, not alone liberty of conscience, but of the human reason, not alone the liberty of organized society, but *personal* liberty, the liberty of the individual, was on trial, and involved in his demand. What Luther there contended for was the right of a man, made in the

image of God, to form and hold his own opinions; the divine prerogative of freedom of mind, thought and soul; that churches had their rights and sphere; that governments had their legitimate powers; but that the individual also had his rights, his sphere of independent action, his domain of liberty, and that within this sacred arcanum no scepter of pontiff, and no sword of monarch, dare enter on pain of the fiat of Almighty God.

America, then, in her separation of Church and State, and in her government by all the people, and for all the people—a true democracy—has profited far more largely by Luther than any modern nation. We are the heirs of his battles and victories and sacrifices, we share in the liberties he achieved, we illustrate in practice the thoughts he originated, as does no other people. America's debt to Luther is one that every man, woman and child of her teeming millions should acknowledge—a debt that it would be as powerless to compute in dollars and cents as it would be to catch and number the drops of Niagara, as its mighty volume of waters plunges over the cataract. But a debt it is at least, that should never be forgotten, and for which we, and the generations that shall come after, and enjoy the blessings of this favoured land, should not cease to be grateful.

This obligation has been expressed by Daniel Webster, America's philosopher statesman, thus: "The Reformation of Luther broke out, kindling up the minds of men afresh, leading to new habits

of thought, and awakening in individuals energies before unknown even to themselves. The religious controversies of this period changed society as well as religion, and to a considerable extent, where they did not change the religion of the State, they changed man himself in his modes of thought, his consciousness of his own powers, and his desire of intellectual attainment. The spirit of commercial and foreign adventure on the one hand and, on the other, the assertion and maintenance of religious liberty, having their source in the Reformation, and this love of religious liberty drawing after it or bringing along with it, as it always does, an ardent devotion to the principle of civil liberty also, were the powerful influences under which character was formed and men trained for the great work of introducing English civilization, English law, and, what is more than all, Anglo-Saxon blood, into the wilderness of North America."

XIII

THE HERO OF UNIVERSAL PROTESTANTISM

LUTHER was a man for the whole world. While he was a German of the Germans, this was only because he realized most powerfully the genius of his environment. He saw life acutely, and he saw it whole. The great truth he brought to light had in it nothing peculiar to the German spirit. In it he grasped an original and universal Christian idea, quite beyond all race limitations. Thus, Luther as a thinker is not a German type, but "a man by himself" who belongs to no age exclusively, and who, therefore, is a genius in the classic sense of the term, a man who, as a productive force, exerted a most powerful influence not alone on the contemporary, but also on the latter age. He has thus been claimed by all schools of thought. The great scientific dogmaticians of the seventeenth century, who constructed so imposing an orthodox theology, in a strong sense, truly represented him, but the Pietists of the eighteenth century, who directly opposed these stiff theological codes, really were nearer to his inner spirit. Their great leader, Spener, placed Luther's writings next to the Bible as a means of devotion. The Humanists and the Rationalists admired him as the author of freedom

of thought. Calvin signed the Augsburg Confession, and called Luther the most distinguished teacher of God since the apostles, so that the Presbyterians have a part in him. The Church of England almost became Lutheran and in its translation of the Bible, in the Thirty-nine Articles,—the majority of which are taken bodily from the Augsburg Confession,—and in the liturgic forms and offices of the Book of Common Prayer, show Luther's hand, so that it is richly entitled to share in his honour. Wesley ascribed his conversion to Luther's wonderfully spiritual preface to Romans, so that the Methodist Church feels his influence in her foundation. "As Paul converted Luther, so Luther converted Wesley. It was Luther's preface to Romans that turned Wesley from a servant to a son, from a pious churchman and model clergyman to a burning apostle, with a world for his parish, and a mind much more free and liberal than many of his followers realize."[1] And even the Roman Catholics in the Council of Trent introduced many of the reforms he stood for. No one communion then expresses exhaustively the Christianity of Luther or can claim him exclusively. Great men, indeed, live for all mankind. The vicarious principle is shot through the whole web of nature. The world's progress is built upon the hearts of a few. Win a great victory for the right, and its fruitage is reaped by all mankind. Voice a truth, and it will resound about the world. So was it with Luther.

[1] Principal Forsyth, Hackney College, London.

XIV

LUTHER'S GROWING FAME

LUTHER'S fame, unlike that of other personalities, grows brighter with the lapse of years. The more he is studied and the keener search-light is cast upon him the nobler he appears. More biographies have appeared of him in the last decade than in any like preceding period, and he is more largely quoted to-day, and his influence is more deeply felt on current religious thought than ever. The personality of Luther appears to be the most unique, myriad-featured and powerful in history. He is not alone the author of a new era in the history of religion, but from him dates a new epoch in the progress of civilization. Such fruit the womb of time bears but once in thousands of years. As the eminent Unitarian thinker, James Freeman Clarke, put it: "The character of Luther had a mountainous grandeur. When near Mont Blanc you perceive its ragged precipices and shapeless ravines, but, as you recede, it towers high above its neighbouring peaks until its features are softened by the atmosphere and melted into strange tints and beautiful shadows: and it stands the object of reverence and wonder, one of the most sublime objects in nature and marvellous creations of God. So stands Luther, a

hero, growing more the mark of reverence through succeeding centuries: the real author of modern liberty of thought and action, and the giant founder of modern civilization and pure religion."

And the lesson is one that our materialistic age especially should note. Luther was a spiritual hero. He wielded no sword but the weapon of truth. He bore no scepter but the authority of the Word of God. He had for his only ideal, religion: his only aim, the good of men and the everlasting welfare of the soul. And because he was thus a warrior, a prince, and a hero of the realm of spirit, his fame is set upon a hill that cannot be hid, and his light shines like a mighty sea-mark into the far abyss of time.

LUTHER

Star after star in radiant grandeur rose
To shame the midnight of the soul away!—
But, chief o'er all the galaxy of lights
That stud the firmament of Christian fame,
Shin'd *Luther* forth,—that miracle of men!
The gospel hero, who with faith sublime
Fulmin'd the lightnings of God's flaming word
Full on the towers of superstition's home,
Till, lo! they crumbled! and his with'ring flash
Yet sears the ruin with victorious play.

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